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BOOK REVIEWS

Read what people affected by cancer think about...



All that followed. A story of cancer, kids and the fear of leaving too soon (2018)

Campbell E.

London: Mirror Books, 2018.

350pp.

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Average star rating 4.3 (out of 5)

Macmillan Cancer Support
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7UQ

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This is a good read for when you feel like giving up or when you want to see how someone else managed life and cancer. It is easy to understand because it is personal and has a personable flow. The author writes well and clearly has a gift for inspiring others. It's appealing to look at. It doesn't feel too heavy a subject to broach because the cover is light and bright. Cover design is very important.

I like the author's writing style, the inspiration, the story-telling and the other elements of life – not just cancer.

Lived experienced of acinic cell carcinoma (36-45) (July 2019)

This is an honest account of what it is like to be diagnosed with breast cancer and all the fears, anxieties, and concerns that come with diagnosis. Emma also tells of how she coped with her marriage breakdown and four children (including triplets). It's also an account of how friends and family pulled together to help in whatever way they could and restores your faith in people.

The cover is eye catching and the font is a good size. Any technical words are ones that most people are familiar with. Emma's personality comes across very well and as I read I felt I was getting to know her as a person. She makes you laugh, cry and want to give her a hug when things really go wrong. You can understand her frustration, her fears, and her joy.

Emma writes from the heart, she's inspirational, honest, and you experience the ups, downs and everything in between. Once I started, I didn't want to put it down; I wanted to know how someone who had just had triplets (she already had one son) was able to cope not only with cancer but with the breakdown of her marriage. It's not all doom and gloom; parts make you smile and you can feel the love that Emma has for her family and for life. The saying "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger" is certainly true of Emma; she is an amazingly strong woman and an inspiration.

Overall, it is quite useful as a general insight into someone's journey and how they cope with diagnosis. Emma's story makes you realise that, no matter how bad or difficult life is, there is always someone worse off; if they pull through so can you.

Living with pelvic cancer (in remission) (56-65) (July 2019)

This is suitable for anyone affected by breast cancer and family and friends. It is suitable at any stage – it gives hope. It reads like a novel and is easy to understand, there is nothing technical. It's not like the usual diary of a patient's cancer experience; Emma shares her story of love, loss, heartache, relationship problems, and trying to cope with triplets and a young son during her cancer journey.

The title appealed to me. The cover has a photo of the author and her beautiful children. There are two photos inside: one at the beginning when the children were small; one at the back when they are seven years older. The typeface is good.

I love this book. Emma stresses the importance of having and accepting help from friends and family. Her story is inspirational. Because it is written so well I had to remind myself at times that it is a real story and not a novel.

Breast cancer 2011 (66-75) (June 2019)

I really enjoyed this book and recommend it to anyone, regardless of cancer experience. It is extremely well written by a woman who has dealt with cancer twice whilst bringing up four children, including triplets, and whose relationship with the children's father has broken down.

It is a real page turner; I was willing Emma to cope with all that life threw at her. She admits she couldn't have coped without her wonderful support network, but she is extremely able. She doesn't spare the reader the sheer helplessness she feels at times, but she also expresses her total love for her children. We also hear about her new relationships and the man she eventually marries.

I did not find it at all depressing. It is written without self-pity, with great humour and great appreciation for all the help she receives from family, friends and strangers. There is no sugar coating, but I wouldn't worry about someone in a similar situation reading this book, something I cannot always say about such books.

Cancer diagnosis 2011. I have lost, among others, my mum to cancer (56-65) (May 2019)

This is useful for patients and anyone who has a loved one with any type of cancer. Emma expresses her thoughts, feelings and worries clearly and with emotion. She explains how friends rallied to help her with the more practical aspects. It will help carers understand their loved one's mind, so they can support them. It could help to normalise thoughts and feelings for someone living with cancer, so they know they are not alone and that other people have been through it too. Emma also discusses her relationship with her breasts and how she changes towards them.

The first chapters are slow and jump around a little, with lots about her relationship with her children's father, but after this I loved it and realised that she needed to set the scene for life before cancer, so that the reader could really understand the impact of diagnosis. Everything then makes sense. It is very easy to understand, in plain English and day-to-day language.

I really enjoyed it and highly recommend it, especially to friends and family who want to be prepared for the emotional ups and downs. I like that Emma was raw and exposed about her thoughts and feelings, rough or smooth, good or bad. It gives a real insight into her life, how she felt, how she coped, and sometimes didn't. I wish I had read it sooner; it could have helped me understand what my friend was going through so much more. It starts slowly but keep going, it is full of laughter, tears, and joy. It is easy to engage with Emma. She exposes her innermost thoughts and feelings as only the bravest of us would. If you are looking for how cancer affects real life, this is for you; if you are looking for medical facts and figures it isn't. She does not go into detail about drugs or treatment but discusses her life, the help she receives, how she deals with her fears, and how treatment affects her. She encourages the reader to reach out and take every bit of help available. She is brave enough to say 'Yes' and accept support from friends and family, has some amazing experiences along the way and finds love. She shows us what is important in life and when to sit back and let someone else take the reins, so we can rest and recover.

Friend of someone who had Hodgkin lymphoma; family member of someone with breast cancer (36-45) (February 2019)

This is an insight into how cancer affects someone's life and changes it dramatically. Even if your life has not been touched by cancer, it will be of interest. It is expertly written and an entertaining, interesting read. The language is easy to understand and the book flows well. The cover is one of the best I have seen in a long time.

I love it. It is a vivid and honest account of how Emma's life changed overnight following diagnosis. What shines through is her feisty spirit and attitude. The many wonderful individuals who rallied around and gave Emma so much support should also be acknowledged, because Emma's story would be very different had it not been for the superb friends, family and charitable organisations who came to her rescue. This is an upbeat story, far from sad. I would not hesitate to recommend it.

Carer of breast cancer patient (now deceased); health care professional (56-65) (February 2019)

Emma is living with breast cancer, but her book is about much more; it is about living with cancer alongside other challenges, including being a single mum, and she writes honestly about those challenges. Emma's situation of facing cancer twice as a single mum of four children is unique, so there are not necessarily many things that everyone will relate to. However, she still manages to pull the reader in and writes honestly about her feelings at various stages of her journey, feelings that many patients can relate to. The book is funny and sad at times and beautifully written. Anyone, even those with no link to cancer, will enjoy it. Emma is a fantastic writer and honest about her feelings and experiences. It is not written in strict chronological order, but that is part of the 'story' and serves to make the book more interesting.

I finished this fantastic book in a couple of days. I like everything – the honesty, the great writing, the humour – such an easy book to get into and enjoy! Emma draws the reader into her challenging, at times chaotic, world and I was rooting for her

throughout. She writes so honestly about her feelings, relationships and the trials and tribulations of cancer treatment whilst being a single mother to four children, but it is also uplifting and heart warming, especially when she writes about the wonderful ways in which her friends and family rallied around her. It is also very funny in parts – I laughed out loud! The unique story and great writing make it suitable for anyone.

Emma says that she always wanted to be a writer and she has certainly achieved that dream. Brilliant! I recommend it to anyone with breast cancer and those without. However, Emma does not describe procedures and treatment in detail; she gives a good insight into living with cancer, but that is only one facet. If you are specifically looking for a book about what it is like to have cancer on a practical level, such as surgery or chemotherapy, or lots of technical language, then this is not for you.

Breast cancer patient (36-45) (November 2018)

I was reading this book on a train, when a woman peered over my shoulder and said, “I was going to buy that, but I thought it would be too sad”. And in many ways, it is. Who couldn’t be saddened by reading about Emma Campbell’s life? A financially strapped single mum, diagnosed with breast cancer, with a young child and new-born triplets all squeezed into a cosy flat at the top of a long flight of stairs. You could say that, when luck was being doled out, Emma was at the back of the queue.

But Emma’s story is t so much more. It’s essentially a love story. Ferocious maternal love. The love of a circle of incredible friends, loyal family members and the generosity of strangers. Of love found, lost, fought for, unrequited and found again. Love that is simultaneously joyous and agonising, tender and brutal.

Emma’s account covers a nine-year period from 2008 (D-Day) to December 2017. We learn about the sheer exhaustion of bringing up four young children alone, how cancer has no respect for any plans, but still manages to introduce new possibilities. Emma’s struggle with the fragility of life is counterbalanced by her women friends’ strength and laughter. This book is full of everything that really matters in life – finding love at the most unexpected time and place but embracing it anyway.

The account is told in the first person, in diary format, starting with diagnosis. Emma writes in an accessible, chatty, candid and lively way, which is appealing and easy to understand; there is no medical jargon. The cover is busy (a bit like the author’s life) and includes photos of her and her four young children. There are two photos (black and white) at the beginning and end of the book, of Emma and her children.

My response to the woman on the train? “Oh no, it’s not all sad. It’s a love story really.” It’s an honest account of living with cancer. It’s sad, but not depressing. It makes you laugh as well as cry. It’s hopeful. It’s useful in terms of understanding the emotional turmoil of diagnosis, treatment, and living with cancer and would be helpful to carers, friends, and health professionals (especially midwives and health visitors)

Friend of someone living with cancer (46-55) (November 2018)



This very real account of living with cancer is very useful for anyone who wants to know how tough it can be. The author doesn't pull any punches, she tells it like it is. It may be helpful for anyone who struggles with fear. It is kind of chronological, an autobiographical account, but also has memory flashes and jumps about a bit. There is very little technical content. The author writes as I would imagine she speaks in general conversation.

I like the fact that it is very real, but I found it quite difficult to get into, mainly due to the frequent blasphemy, which I found uncomfortable. Apart from that, it is a very real account of one woman's ongoing experience with cancer and how it affects the lives of everyone around her. However, if you have issues with swearing, it is not for you.

Breast cancer survivor (46-55) (May 2019)

This is useful for coping with diagnosis and treatment physically and emotionally, realising the impact of support from family and friends – practical and emotional – and remaining positive and hopeful in difficult circumstances.

It is an appealing book – not a medical book but the personal story of a woman struggling with life and cancer. It has an attractive cover design, engaging chapter titles and short-ish chapters. The font is quite small but readable. The story moves in a linear manner from difficulties with IVF and the subsequent birth of triplets to cancer diagnosis and treatment. It is very easy to read and understand – undemanding in terms of text and language, with little medical jargon. The style of writing is engaging; it is warm and funny but with a depth of feeling.

I like the story of Emma's cancer journey – her courage in the face of IVF, the birth of triplets and bringing up four babies/young children and then cancer diagnosis and treatment. Her emotional journey will resonate with anyone who has had their own struggle with cancer. The descriptions of the help and support she received from family and friends are heart warming and bring a real positivity to the book.

It is more interesting as a story of courage in the face of extreme adversity than a book about cancer. There are, however, threads that are particularly relevant to cancer patients: dealing with diagnosis and treatment; emotional issues relating to living life to the full; and the constant fear of death. I recommend it as a book that reminds cancer patients that they are not alone, that millions of other people face the same circumstances and emotional issues. It is very positive and uplifting. However, it might not be a positive read for cancer patients who are dealing with their illness alone and do not have a huge circle of family and friends to call on for support.

Cancer survivor – oesophageal cancer (56-65) (March 2019)



This is an effective glimpse into the life someone having treatment, so is most useful for family and friends. Emma mentions repeatedly how helpful she found the support of friends and family, particularly with domestic tasks. The most beneficial aspect, particularly for someone with breast cancer, is the value of 'mindset'. Emma learns that always expecting the worst, however understandable, prevents any real quality of life. An example refers to how terrible her honeymoon was after seeing a video on Facebook including someone else with cancer. Without giving too much away, she explains the benefits of a more positive mindset and the futility of negative thoughts.

It is written in chronological order and relatively easy to understand. The language is appropriate given the informal style; some may not like the references to sex and swearing, but they generally add to the authenticity. Most of the book is about the difficulties of raising triplets and I would like more photos of them growing up. I like Emma's honesty; she clearly struggled with her relationship and young children before cancer and the fact that she focuses on her children gives a positive message that her cancer isn't all-consuming. However, whilst she is often self-deprecating in a humorous sense, this occasionally goes too far and reads negatively.

Overall, it is an interesting read; the lessons Emma learned could benefit people in a similar situation (minus the triplets!), especially the advice on the most useful forms of support for friends/relatives and on keeping a positive mindset. She is lucky to have extensive support – others without such support may not find this relatable. If you want more information about treatment, it lacks the detail required.

Son of lung cancer patient (26-35) (January 2019)

This is very easy to understand. Emma explains everything in layman's terms and tells her story using a simple narrative. It does look like a pregnancy or child-rearing handbook. Emma is an amazing woman, and this is a great, honest story that tells it like it is. What comes through most is her love for her children. How incredible to cope with diagnosis and treatment, a relationship break-up, and triplets – all at once. What also shines through is that when you are offered help, take it, make use of your friends. Never say no, and never be afraid to ask for help from those that know and love you. (Hmm, must take lessons in this).

Living with cancer (myelodysplastic syndrome) (46-55) (September 2018)



This is more about the author's journey with triplets than about cancer. I don't think it is a useful read for anyone with cancer and I probably wouldn't recommend it.

In remission from breast cancer (46-55) (September 2019)

Further information

Why does Macmillan Cancer Support review books?

We use reviews to help us compile a list of suggested cancer books, the [Macmillan Core Book List](#). Cancer information centres and public libraries can use this list to select appropriate and relevant books for people affected by cancer.

We add reviews to the [Directory of information materials for people affected by cancer](#) so that people affected by cancer can see what others in a similar situation think about a book. You can also see details of all the books reviewed in the [Book reviews listing](#), which also has links to all the reviews.

We recruit most of our reviewers through the [Volunteering Village](#) and the [Cancer Voices Network](#), people affected by cancer who have signed up to help Macmillan Cancer Support in a number of ways. Volunteers are a vital part of our book review process; since 2007, over 1,500 Macmillan volunteers have written more than 6,000 reviews of over 500 different books.

If you are a health professional who would like to review books for us, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

Information and support for people affected by cancer

If you are looking for support to help you live life with cancer, you may wish to contact one of [Macmillan's cancer information and support services](#). Or you can call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00** (Mon-Fri 9am–8pm). We have an interpreting service in over 200 languages. Just state, in English, the language you wish to use. If you are deaf or hard of hearing you can use textphone no 0808 808 0121 or Text Relay.

You can also email us using the [website enquiry form](#). Alternatively, [visit our website](#).

Feedback

If you have any comments, please [email Sue Hawkins](#), Information Materials Researcher, Macmillan Cancer Support.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

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